

QHP-0036  
Dear Commissioner Henney:

Both of my parents died  
from heart attacks, so  
I take diet & nutrition  
seriously.

When food manufacturers  
finally eliminated yalom  
bein & other dangerous  
oils from many foods, I  
thought a major battle  
had been won.

What remains however  
is the dangerous & ever-

QHP-0036

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present partially hydrogenated  
or trans fat.

I would be interested  
in knowing what the  
FDA is doing to educate  
consumers & push food  
manufacturers in using  
safer alternatives.

Thank you

Sincerely  
Cheryl Mendonsa

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# NUTRITION ACTION

## HEALTH LETTER

CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Volume 23/Number 7

Is Salt Harmful?  
—page 6

## Trans: The Phantom Fat

BY MARGO WOOTAN, BOB LIEBMAN,  
& WENDIE ROSENBERG

**W**hat's worse for your heart and your waistline:

- A McDonald's Quarter Pounder or a large order of McDonald's Fries?
- Six Van de Kamp's Breaded Fish Sticks or an Arby's Roast Beef Sandwich?
- A Dunkin' Donuts Old Fashioned Cake Donut or a half cup of Häagen-Dazs Chocolate Ice Cream?

It doesn't matter. The calories, total fat, and artery-clogging fat in each pair are about the same.

How can fried potatoes, fish, or baked goods pose the same threat to your heart as beef, ice cream, and other foods that are loaded with saturated fat?

Blame it on the *trans*. The phantom fat lurks in foods that are made with partially hydrogenated oils or shortenings. Why phantom? Because food labels don't have to disclose how much *trans* a food contains.

So until we tested dozens of items purchased in seven cities across the country, there was no way to tell how much *trans* is secretly undermining your diet.

■ CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ■

# Trans: The Phantom Fat

It's not saturated, monounsaturated, or polyunsaturated, according to the "Nutrition Facts" label on food packages. Except for a few margarines that proudly declare "no *trans* fatty acids," it's invisible.

But not to your blood vessels. In half a dozen clinical studies, *trans* fat raised people's blood cholesterol about as much as saturated fat did.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

"It's a secret killer," says Walter Willett, head of the nutrition department at the Harvard School of Public Health. "With saturated fat, at least food labels tell you how much you're eating. With *trans*, it's anybody's guess."

That's why the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)—the nonprofit consumer advocacy group that publishes *Nutrition Action Healthletter*—has petitioned the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to require that *trans* fat be included not just in the *Total Fat* number on food labels (as it is now), but in the *Saturated Fat* number as well. That way, consumers would be able to see how much artery-clogging fat any food had.

That wouldn't be necessary if it were easy to figure out how much *trans* fat a food contains. But it's just about impossible.

*Trans* is created when oils are "partially hydrogenated." Hydrogenation is what turns liquid oil into Crisco or stick margarines. It also makes oils more stable (so they can be re-used more times in deep-frying) and makes pie crusts flakier and french fries crispier.

You could cut *trans* fat by avoiding the thousands of foods with "partially hydrogenated oil" in their ingredient lists. But that may not be practical. Besides, the oil in some foods is only slightly hydrogenated—which means

there's just a little *trans*.

Unfortunately, there's no simple way to distinguish them from foods whose oil is heavily hydrogenated—which means it has lots of *trans*.

It's not just the "Nutrition Facts" panels that will snooker you. You've got to watch out for the claims on the packages as well. The FDA limits the amount of saturated fat in foods that make a "no-cholesterol" or "low-cholesterol" claim. But it sets no limit on *trans* fat. If the agency counted *trans* along with saturated fat, it would be illegal for products like Nabisco Oreos or Wheat Thins to call themselves "no-cholesterol."

And how do you avoid *trans* fat when you eat out? There's no ingredient list to clue you in, and the companies' nutrition brochures ignore it.

That's why we conducted our own nationwide *trans* test. We analyzed 41 foods or meals that are made with partially hydrogenated oils or shortenings.

Our conclusion: Unsuspecting consumers—some under doctors' orders to cut artery-clogging fat to reduce their risk of heart disease—are being broadsided by foods that are far more damaging than they appear to be.

## FRENCH FRY FRAUDS

It was a huge victory...or so we thought. In the late 1980s, pressure from CSPI and other consumer

groups forced the major fast food hamburger chains to stop frying their potatoes, fish, and chicken in beef tallow.

"McDonald's French Fries to be Cooked in Cholesterol-Free, 100% Vegetable Oil," announced the company's press release in 1990.

It was only *partially* right.

The switch was not to pure vegetable oil, but to partially hydrogenated vegetable *shortening*.

The distinction isn't trivial. Our tests show that, thanks to their *trans* fat, the french fries sold at McDonald's, Arby's, and Hardee's have roughly as much artery-clogging fat as if they were fried in lard. Burger King and Wendy's fries are even worse. They're a bigger threat to your arteries than potatoes cooked in beef tallow.

In each case, if you ask the order-taker for a nutrition brochure, you'll see only the amount of saturated fat the fries contain. Not a peep about *trans*. That means half the artery-clogging fat is invisible.

Until fast food chains make good on their promise to use 100% vegetable oil, keep in mind that, to your arteries, a large order of fries from McDonald's, Arby's, or Hardee's looks like a Quarter Pounder. And a large fries from Burger King or Wendy's looks like 1½ Quarter Pounders. Some side dish.

What about frozen supermarket potatoes? Ounce for ounce, the two we tested, Ore-Ida Tater Tots and Ore-Ida Snackin' Fries, were no different than fries from McDonald's, Hardees, and Arby's. (Ore-Ida says that it has reformulated its Snackin' Fries to have less saturated fat, but the newer incarnation is still bad news.)



## How to Avoid *Trans* Fat

### CHICKEN BIG MAC NUGGETS

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that fried chicken is fatty. But it does take a chemist, test tubes, and a lab to ferret out how much your heart is threatened by fried chicken's fat. Thanks to the *trans* fat:

- An order of nine McDonald's Chicken McNuggets is no healthier than a Big Mac.
- A Burger King Chicken Sandwich is roughly the same as a corned beef sandwich plus a bag of potato chips.
- A KFC Original Recipe (thigh and drumstick) Dinner with mashed potatoes and gravy, cole slaw, and a biscuit harbors 52 grams of fat and a day's worth of artery-clogging fat wrapped up in 1,160 calories. (If you skip the skin, we figure you'll save 550 calories and 22 grams of fat, 14 of them *trans* or saturated.)
- Your chicken pot pie might as well be fried. The *trans* plus saturated fat—most of it in the crust—use up 85 percent of your day's artery-clogging fat if you eat at KFC, and 55 percent if you're a Boston Market fan.

### FRIED FISH: WORSE THAN STEAK

Fettuccini Alfredo—one of the worst foods we've ever analyzed—has 1,500 calories, 97 grams of fat, and 48 grams (a two-day supply) of saturated fat.

Now we've found a meal with that much fat *plus* 2,000 calories. A Red Lobster Admiral's Feast—that's fried seafood, french fries, cole slaw, and two pieces of garlic cheese bread—is a coronary from the sea, thanks, in part, to the *trans*-heavy shortening it's fried in.

True, the Feast is no worse than a 12-ounce sirloin steak, a baked potato with butter, green beans with more

1. Look for foods that contain no "vegetable shortening" or "partially hydrogenated" oil.
2. Avoid deep-fried foods. The less fat, the less *trans*, so buy lower-fat margarines, chips, crackers, cookies, pastries, and other processed foods (and don't eat twice as much).
3. Use olive or canola oil instead of butter, margarine, or shortening whenever possible.
4. If you use margarine, buy tubs rather than sticks. To cut fat and calories, get "light," "low-fat," or "fat-free" brands.
5. Foods that are "cholesterol-free," "low-cholesterol," "low-saturated-fat," or "made with vegetable oil" aren't necessarily low in *trans* fat. "Saturated-fat-free" foods are.

butter, and a slice of apple pie topped with half a cup of Häagen-Dazs premium chocolate ice cream. But most people already know that beef and butter make a beeline to their arteries. You don't expect that kind of behavior from a seafood dinner.

Long John Silver's Fish & More dinner (fried fish, french fries, cole slaw, and hushpuppies) is another heart attack with *your* name on it. It's got the calories (1,270), fat (58 grams), and artery-clogging fat (27 grams) of three Swanson frozen Meatloaf Dinners.

And Burger King's BK Big Fish Sandwich is big, all right. To your heart, it's two slices of Pizza Hut Meat Lover's hand-tossed pizza—just one more way to get almost half a day's artery-clogging fat. But the sandwich's 830 calories make the pizza's 640 look petite.

Did someone say fish is good for your heart?

### MARGARINE: TRICKY STICKS

A glance at the label will tell you that a tablespoon of butter has seven grams of saturated fat—a third of a day's worth. Check the label on a full-fat margarine like Parkay stick—which lists only two grams of sat fat—and you'd think the margarine was far superior. That's because the Parkay label omits its *trans* fat. Count the phantom *trans* and Parkay's total "unhealthy" fat hits four grams.

Adding insult to injury, some margarine labels have the nerve to carry misleading claims about their saturated fat. When Parkay and Promise

boast that their sticks have "70 percent less saturated fat than butter," for example, they're not counting *trans* fat. Neither does Crisco when it comes up with its "50 percent less" claim.

What to do? Leave the sticks on the shelf and pick up a tub. If you're trying to cut fat and calories, search for a

tub with the least fat your tastebuds will tolerate. You may be surprised.

One of the winners of our informal taste test—Smart Beat Smarter than Fat Free Super Light Margarine—has only two grams of fat—and *zero trans*—per tablespoon. And its got only a fifth of the 100-something calories you'd get in that much regular margarine or butter.

Even our taste-test champion, Fleischmann's Lower Fat Margarine, has just five grams of fat—only one of them *trans* or saturated. And its calories are less than half of butter's.

If you prefer a full-fat margarine, try Promise tub, which has no *trans*. If you can't live without butter, try Land O' Lakes Light Whipped Butter. It tastes great, and its numbers beat Parkay, Promise, and other full-fat stick margarines pats down. Just don't assume that less fat means you can have twice as much.

### BAKED GOODS: DOUBLE TROUBLE

Checking your labels? Whether it's danish or doughnuts, pies or biscuits, cookies or crackers, the "saturated fat" number listed on the package probably underestimates the mischief those foods will do to the arteries that nourish your heart.

Our tests showed that when you add the *trans* fat that's in these baked goods to their saturated fat, you roughly double the trouble they can cause your blood vessels.

*continued on page 13*



## The Trans Schedule

**H**ere are the foods we tested for *trans* fat, plus a selection of other foods for which we could obtain or calculate *trans* numbers. The list is not exhaustive. It represents just a sampling of what's available.

Within each category, foods are ranked from least artery-clogging fat to most. "Artery-clogging" means "Saturated Fat" plus "Trans Fat" (the total may be off by one gram—due to rounding). Foods that we tested are in *italics*. Serving sizes are in parentheses following each name.

	Calories	Total Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Trans Fat (g)	Artery-Clogging Fat (g)
<b>French Fries</b>					
Ore-Ida Tater Tots (9)	200	6	1	2	3
Ore-Ida Snackin' Fries (1 box)	360	23	4	3	6
Arby's French Fries (large)	490	20	4	3	7
Hardee's French Fries (large)	430	19	4	4	8
McDonald's French Fries (large)	470	19	4	4	8
Wendy's French Fries (Biggie)	470	20	5	7	11
Burger King French Fries (large)	470	22	6	7	12
<b>Chicken &amp; Fish</b>					
<i>Van de Kamp's Breaded Fish</i>					
Sticks (6)	370	16	3	5	8
Burger King Chicken Sandwich (1)	700	30	6	2	8
Burger King BK Big Fish Sandwich (1)	830	31	6	3	8
McDonald's Chicken McNuggets (9)	500	28	6	3	9
<i>Boston Market Original Chicken</i>					
Pot Pie (1)	750	25	7	4	11
KFC Chicken Pot Pie (1)	830	31	9	8	17
<i>KFC Original Recipe Chicken</i>					
Dinner (1)	1,160	52	12	7	19
Long John Silver's Fish & More (1)	1,270	58	13	14	27
Red Lobster Admiral's Feast (1)	2,020	97	26	22	48

### HOW WE GOT OUR NUMBERS

We bought 24 packaged foods at 28 supermarkets and takeout portions of 17 items at 69 restaurants in Albany (N.Y.), Atlanta, Boston, Boulder, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. We made a composite of each of the foods (for example, we blended equal weights of six Boston Market Original Chicken Pot Pies) and shipped the composites to an independent laboratory, where they were analyzed for calories, fat, saturated fat, and *trans* fat.

	Calories	Total Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Trans Fat (g)	Artery-Clogging Fat (g)
<b>Margarines, Fats, &amp; Oils (1Tbs.)</b>					
Promise Ultra Fat Free, tub <sup>1</sup>	5	0	0	0	0
Smart Beat Fat Free! Smarter than Butter!, tub <sup>1</sup>	15	0	0	0	0
Smart Beat Smarter than Fat Free Super Light Margarine, tub <sup>1</sup>	20	2	0	0	0
Promise Ultra 70% Less Fat, tub <sup>1</sup>	30	4	0	0	0
Fleischmann's Lower Fat Margarine, tub <sup>1</sup>	40	5	0	0	1
Spectrum Naturals Spread, tub <sup>1</sup>	90	11	1	0	1
Canola oil <sup>2,3</sup>	120	14	1	0	1
Weight Watchers Light Margarine, tub <sup>1</sup>	50	4	1	1	2
<i>I Can't Believe It's Not Butter! Light, stick</i>	50	6	1	1	2
Shedd's Spread Country Crock, tub	70	7	1	1	2
Promise, tub <sup>1</sup>	90	10	2	0	2
Olive oil <sup>2,3</sup>	120	14	2	0	2
Soybean oil <sup>2,3</sup>	120	14	2	0	2
Land O' Lakes Light Whipped Butter <sup>1</sup>	40	4	3	0	3
Land O' Lakes Country Morning Blend Light, stick <sup>1</sup> or tub <sup>1</sup>	50	6	3	0	3
Land O' Lakes Spread with Sweet Cream, tub <sup>1</sup>	80	8	2	1	3
<i>I Can't Believe It's Not Butter!, tub</i>	90	10	2	1	3
<i>Promise, stick</i>	90	10	2	2	3
Land O' Lakes Country Morning Blend Margarine, tub <sup>1</sup>	100	11	2	1	3
Land O' Lakes Spread with Sweet Cream, stick <sup>1</sup>	90	10	2	2	4
<i>Parkay, stick</i>	90	10	2	3	4
Land O' Lakes Country Morning Blend Margarine, stick <sup>1</sup>	100	11	2	2	4
Land O' Lakes Margarine, stick <sup>1</sup> or tub <sup>1</sup>	100	11	2	2	4
<i>Crisco, can</i>	110	12	3	1	4
Chicken fat <sup>2,3</sup>	120	13	4	0	4

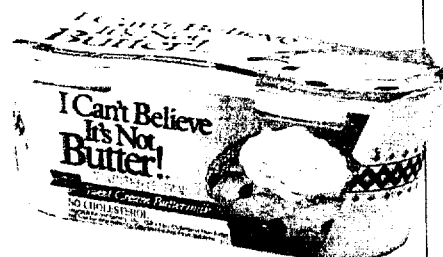
<sup>1</sup> Numbers from the manufacturer. <sup>2</sup> Numbers from U.S.D.A. Handbook 8. <sup>3</sup> *Trans* fat numbers based on Journal of the American College of Nutrition 9: 471, 1990. <sup>4</sup> Numbers from Nutrition Action Healthletter (June 1996, p. 7).

**Daily Limits** (Daily Values): **Total Fat**—65 grams; **Saturated Fat**—20 grams. <sup>4</sup> Analyses done by SGS Control Services, Inc. (Memphis, Tennessee).



## Swiss Cake Rolls

12 CAKES - TWIN WRAPPED NET WT 13 OZS. (369g) K



Cakes aren't quite that uniform. While the *trans* doubles the artery-clogging fat in Little Debbie Swiss

Cake Rolls, it "only" makes Entenmann's Chocolate Fudge Cake and The Cheesecake Factory Linda's Fudge Cake 25 percent worse. Of course, a single slice of Linda's still packs 1,470 calories and three-quarters of your day's quota of artery-clogging fat.

Doubling the bad fat is enough to push some baked goods into the danger zone. A Pillsbury Grands! Buttermilk Biscuit, for example, ends up with more than a third of your 20-gram daily limit of harmful fat. A McDonald's Iced Cheese Danish, an Entenmann's Rich Frosted Donut, or a Dunkin' Donuts Old Fashioned Cake Donut uses up 50 percent. To your heart, each is like eating eight strips of bacon.

<sup>1</sup> American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 59: 861, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Lipid Research 33: 399, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> New England Journal of Medicine 323: 439, 1990.

Calories  
Total Fat (g)  
Sat Fat (g)  
Trans Fat (g)  
Artery-Clogging  
Fat (g)

### Land O' Lakes Sweet Cream

Whipped Butter <sup>1</sup>	60	7	5	0	5
Lard <sup>2,3</sup>	120	13	5	0	5
Butter <sup>2,3</sup>	100	11	7	0	7
Beef tallow <sup>2,3</sup>	120	13	6	0	7

### Baked Goods & Frostings

Nabisco Nilla Wafers (8)	150	4	1	1	2
Betty Crocker Whipped Deluxe Chocolate Frosting (2 Tbs.)	140	4	2	1	2
Nabisco Oreos (3)	160	7	1	2	3
Nabisco Chips Ahoy! (3)	160	7	2	2	4
Pillsbury Creamy Supreme Vanilla Frosting (2 Tbs.)	150	8	2	2	4
Entenmann's Homestyle Apple Pie (½)	310	10	3	3	6
Little Debbie Swiss Cake Rolls (2)	300	12	3	4	6
Entenmann's Chocolate Fudge Cake (½)	410	17	5	2	6
KFC biscuit (1)	200	11	2	4	7
Pillsbury Grands! Buttermilk Biscuit (1)	230	11	3	4	7
Starbucks Cholesterol Free Blueberry Scone (1) <sup>4</sup>	420	15	4	4	7
McDonald's Iced Cheese Danish (1)	360	19	5	4	9
Entenmann's Rich Frosted Donut (1)	310	18	4	5	10
Dunkin' Donuts Old Fashioned Cake Donut (1)	310	19	5	6	10
Cinnabon Cinnabon (1) <sup>4</sup>	670	34	9	6	14
The Cheesecake Factory Linda's Fudge Cake (1 piece)	1,470	41	12	3	15

### Crackers & Snacks

Keebler Club Partners Original Crackers (4)	70	3	1	1	1
Nabisco Ritz Crackers (5)	90	4	1	1	2
Nabisco Triscuits (7)	140	5	1	2	2
Nabisco Wheat Thins (16)	150	5	1	2	3
Orville Redenbacher's Natural Popcorn, microwave (4 cups)	110	8	2	2	4

Sheryl Bedno, Amy Benjamin, Allison Birney, Emma Fogt, Bonnie Kanders, Leslie Quillin, Jeanette Skoff, Ingrid VanTuinen, and Lisa Wootan helped buy or process the foods analyzed in this study.

### DEAR DAVE

It's been 2½ years since CSPI petitioned the FDA to count *trans* as saturated fat on labels and to ban claims like "low-cholesterol" or "low-saturated-fat" on foods that are high in *trans*.

"We're moving forward on the petition," says FDA nutritionist Camile Brewer. Perhaps the FDA needs another nudge (see coupon). Says Harvard's Walter Willett: "It's outrageous that people can't find out how much of this harmful fat their foods contain."

**TO:** David Kessler, Commissioner  
Food and Drug Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 1471  
Rockville, Maryland 20857

**RE:** Docket No. 94P-0036-CP1

**FROM:** \_\_\_\_\_

I urge you to take swift action on the petition by the Center for Science in the Public Interest and require that *trans* fat be included with saturated fat on food labels. Also, the amount of *trans* fat should be limited in foods that make claims like "low-saturated-fat," "cholesterol-free," or "cooked in vegetable oil." And "partially hydrogenated oil" should be called "partially saturated shortening" on food labels.

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